

Stacy Schniegenberg – (Re) Imaginings Artistic Statement

People with disabilities face constant challenges every day. There is always some lack of accommodation that hinders their ability to complete everyday tasks. Each experience effects disabled people differently. The book *Disability Visibility* uses different essays to explore these perspectives and explain them in detail. One of the essays, “Guide dogs don’t lead blind people. We wander as one,” really inspired me. In this essay, the author, Haben Girma, lost her vision and was forced to take classes and use a dog just to be able to walk safely around her campus. This made me realize how quickly disabilities can impact simple, everyday activities. Walking and being able to see where you are going is something that many people take for granted. When people lose their vision, their lives are drastically changed. However, many people still do not seem to fully understand the extent that people’s lives are changed by a disability. Many don’t understand the reason so many accommodations for disabled people need to be made, or they just do not care and think it is annoying and inconvenient. These realizations inspired me to create a project that really captures the everyday struggles disabled people face, and the way abled bodied people view the accommodations that are made for disabled people.

To do this, I created a series of journal entries. I did this using a power point slide show to represent a journal that can be opened, and then I created three separate “pages” of the journal. Each page is from a different perspective. The first page gives the point of view of a mobility impaired girl who is trying to go Christmas shopping with her mom. She has to go to the mall but finds that she is unable to get to the second floor due to the lack of accommodations that the mall has available for people who are wheelchair bound. The second entry dives into the struggles of a blind girl who was going to go to the mall but is now forced to shop online due to weather conditions. Finally, the last entry explores the perspective of an abled bodied person who does not understand accommodations and finds it annoying that disabled people get so many “privileges” when it comes to public and digital spaces.

Journal Entries

2021

December 16, 2021 – Mobility Impaired

Dear Journal,

I'm going to the mall today. Christmas is only a little over a week away, and I still have shopping to do. It's always a challenge for people like me to go out. Being wheelchair bound isn't easy. I can't drive, so I ask my mother if she can take me. I know she doesn't want to because it's not exactly easy for her to deal with me. She says yes anyway, so we get into the car. It's a struggle for me to get into the seat. I wonder why they don't make cars easier to get into. Oh well. We soon arrive at the mall and it's packed. None of the handicapped parking spots are available. I look at the cars in those spots, and none of them have a handicapped placard. Why do people have to be so inconsiderate? We end up finding a spot and it's far away from the entrance. Just great. As I get settled into my wheelchair, I feel that the ground is bumpy. I almost fall out of my chair twice because of the huge bumps we go over. When we finally reach the door, I realize the stores we want to shop at are not on the first floor. Ugh. My mom pushes me around for what feels like hours looking for a ramp. Then we find out that they don't have one. How am I going to get the second floor? Thankfully, we find an employee and ask him for help. Yep, no ramps. But they do have an elevator that we can use. The only problem is that it is all the way across the first floor. My mom just grunts and starts pushing me.

While she's pushing me, I get curious and pull out my phone. Surely there is some type of regulations to make malls accessible to people with wheelchairs. I stumble across something called the American With Disabilities Act. It basically says that discrimination against disabled people is illegal, and public accommodations for disabled people need to be made. I think the mall is violating this law. We reach the elevator and come to find out it's out of order. Just wow. We turn to find another employee to ask for guidance, and none are around. Do they not have any help around here? My mom asks me what we should do, and I don't know how to answer her.

My thoughts begin to trail off and I begin to get angry. Every day I find myself bombarded with these kinds of inconveniences and I'm sick of it. I wish the world would just make things more accommodating. I come back to my reality and see my mom waiting for an answer. I ask her if she can go upstairs and do my shopping for me. She says no, as she does not know what I need to buy. Fantastic. I see that there is no way I can change her mind, so we begin to make our way back to the car. I am so frustrated with how this day went. I cannot believe the mall did not have just one single ramp. That's all it would have taken to allow me to do my shopping. I guess I will now just have to do my shopping online. Thank goodness I have my sight. I do not think online shopping has many accommodations for people with disabilities either.

December 17, 2021 – Visually Impaired

Dear Journal,

A big snowstorm hit us last night, so almost everything around us is closed. Just great. Christmas is soon, and I had set aside today to do my shopping. I really prefer to do my shopping in person so I can touch and feel everything I want to buy. I always have to get someone to take me to the mall and shop with me, but I feel like I can get better presents for everyone when I buy them in person. Now, my only option is to shop online because today was the only day that my friend was available to shop with me. I really try to avoid online shopping because it's not very easy for me to understand exactly what I am buying. Even though I prefer to be able to touch the items I am buying, I am glad that there are digital accommodations that will help me navigate the internet. I can use voice commands that get to me the pages webpages where I want to shop. When I get to the pages that have the items I want, I then use my computer to read the description of the items to me. I am lucky that I have a special computer that uses voice commands and is also able to read things to me. I think that these are available because of the law. I heard something about the Rehabilitation Act requiring technology to be accessible to people who have disabilities. I am glad this is a requirement. Without these accommodations, I would never be able to access the internet and be able to get the same information that sighted people can get.

Most of the time, the information that I get is pretty accurate. However, sometimes it doesn't work as well. I remember the last time I tried to buy a sweater for my Mom online. The description said that the sweater I was ordering was medium blue with black trim. However, when it came, my Mom told me that it was bright pink with a red trim. My Mom was too kind to say it, but when she described it to me, it sounded so ugly. We both laughed when I told her I had ordered it because it was her favorite color. Fortunately, I was able to return it and she helped me order the sweater I had intended to get for her. People who have their sight cannot begin to appreciate how difficult the simplest things become when you don't have the ability to see.

December 18, 2021 – Able Bodied

Dear Journal,

I went Christmas shopping today at Costco and I am so mad. There were so many people shopping and I barely even found a parking spot. There were about a dozen handicapped parking spots available right in front of the store, but only two or three were being used. I can't understand why they set aside so many prime parking spots for handicapped people when it prevents everyone else from using them. Sometimes I am so tempted to park in one of them, but I don't want to be fined for using it. Instead, I had to drive around the parking lot until I found a spot about as far away from the entrance as I could get. Sometimes I think the disabled get so many privileges.

After I was done shopping at Costco, I stopped at the library to drop off some books. I needed to use the restroom while I was there and found that the one on the first floor was closed. I couldn't believe that I had to go upstairs to use the bathroom because they were making repairs to the one on the first floor. Apparently, someone thought it would be a good idea to have a handicapped accessible bathroom, so they were modifying the existing restroom. It was so annoying to be inconvenienced just because they wanted make a bigger stall and put some handrails in. I think they should be more considerate and not close bathrooms. I realize that they are putting them in because it is the law, but I think our lawmakers should spend time on things that benefit the majority of people. Why are they busy making laws that benefit so few people?

When I got home today, I turned on the television because I wanted to listen to the Governor give his Ohio update. When he was giving his speech, they split the screen between the Governor and a person signing his speech. I thought it was so distracting to have to watch a person signing when I was trying to hear him talk. I think they should just tell people who are hearing impaired to use close captions instead of going through the expense of paying someone to sign that just detracts from the Governor's speech. I don't understand why they are worried about a few disabled people. There can't be that many of them anyway.